

VZCZCXRO0335
PP RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH RUEHTRO
DE RUEHGO #0188/01 0850533
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 260533Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8811
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1863
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5341
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8934
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6510
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 2114
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2328
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000188

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/26/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SNAR](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [KTIP](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: MEETING WITH MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS

RANGOON 00000188 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: P/E Chief Jennifer Harhigh for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

1. (C) During a March 24 meeting with visiting EAP/MLS Director Stephen Blake and Charge, Burmese Minister of Home Affairs and acting Minister of Immigration Major General Aung Oo reflected views we believe are typical among Burma's top generals. He described the country's need for stability and security, which, he is convinced, can only be provided by the military. He criticized Aung San Suu Kyi and Burmese living outside Burma's borders, who are perceived as threatening state stability. He proposed that Burma is not yet ready for Western-style democracy. At the same time, the Minister noted historical ties between the U.S. and Burma, recognized the country's geostrategic location between China and India, and said he understands Burma cannot stand alone. He expressed appreciation for U.S. cooperation to combat illegal drugs and trafficking in persons and asked for more such cooperation. In response, Mr. Blake and the Charge stressed the negative effect the GOB's human-rights performance has on international decision-making, urging, in particular, the release of political prisoners and dialogue with the opposition. End summary.

2. (C) Minister Maung Oo welcomed Mr. Blake and Charge during a March 24 meeting at the Ministry of Home Affairs in Nay Pyi Taw, saying he was honored by the visit. He noted he has met with ICRC officials, UN Special Rapporteurs for Human Rights Ojea Quintana and Pinhiero, and UN High Commissioner for Refugees Guterres. The Minister said he welcomed the chance to dispel "one-sided thinking" regarding Burma and referenced a quote by Buddha akin to "seeing is believing."

Values U.S. Cooperation on Drugs and Trafficking

3. (C) Maung Oo praised close collaboration between Burma and the U.S., particularly the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), to combat illicit drugs, noting that such cooperation peaked in the period 1974-1986. He acknowledged that Burma cannot fight the drug battle alone. He encouraged U.S. sharing of information on drug cases and

pledged continued cooperation. Later in the meeting, he lamented that Burma is not allowed to participate in training conducted at the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA), based in Bangkok. The minister mentioned his ministry's work to combat trafficking in persons, noting that the Thailand-Burma border is unstable due to active insurgency and the constant movement of migrant workers. He said Burma and the U.S. should "fight together" against trafficking. The Minister noted with pride the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) de-listing of Burma in 2006.

14. (C) The Charge responded that the U.S. recognizes the benefits of cooperation on law enforcement issues such as trafficking and narcotics and would enjoy more cooperation. He recognized that Burma would like to participate in ILEA training; but political issues matter is the equation. He stressed the importance for the regime to free political prisoners and engage in a true dialogue.

Burma's Not Ready for Democracy

15. (C) The Minister launched into a description of Burma's political situation, claiming that Burma's people are far from ready for democracy. He marveled at President Obama's inauguration, during which former rivals for the presidency attended the ceremony to congratulate the new President, saying such a scene could never take place in Burma, where if one side can't win, it will not accept the result. (Note: Amazingly, it seemed he was directing his comment at the democratic opposition, not at his own military which refused to accept election results in 1990.) Given such realities, the Minister stressed the need for unity and stability. He discussed at length the need for law and order to prevail and

RANGOON 00000188 002.2 OF 003

the belief that a lack of strong leadership would lead to disturbances. He factored in that Burma is "sandwiched" between India and China. He emphasized the need to unify Burma's 135 ethnic groups and described how 17 ethnic insurgent groups have been "brought into the legal fold." The Minister said the military government is trying its best to unite the 135 groups for the development of the nation, despite efforts to obstruct the process.

No Fan of the Lady

16. (C) The Minister expressed frustration with the portrayal of Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest as inconsistent with Burmese law, claiming that actions taken against her by the GOB have all been "in harmony" with the law, with Home Affairs in the lead role. Barely containing his disdain for ASSK, he shuffled a number of documents in front of him, which he alleged lay out ample evidence of her collaboration with insurgent and terrorist groups and her intention to jeopardize the state. The Minister implied that he believes the government has actually been more lenient with her than it could have been because of her father's legacy as a national hero.

17. (C) The Minister said he understands globalization and that a country cannot stand alone but then claimed the economic crisis is not affecting Burma much. He ended his introductory monologue by concluding that with a centrally-commanded military government "it is easy to communicate", and he urged "higher" U.S. authorities to deal with the regime more frequently.

"Free and Fair" Elections Must Have Meaning

18. (C) EAP/MLS Director Blake noted that he was in the region as part of a routine visit to the five countries under his purview. He said the new U.S. administration is reviewing its policies and that the Secretary is interested

in Southeast Asia. He thanked the Minister for cooperation on drug enforcement efforts and noted the progress made by the GOB on trafficking in persons. Citing the Minister's own words, "seeing is believing," Mr. Blake told the Minister that the U.S. has observed contradictions in the GOB's claims that the 2010 election will be free and fair. In order to have free and fair elections, you need candidates; yet many of Burma's likely candidates are in jail. You need to be able to reconcile with those who don't share the same political views, rather than lock them up.

¶9. (C) The Minister replied that the 2010 elections will be free, fair, and transparent, and that the international community will be invited to observe. He lamented that the international media are a problem because they don't reflect the real situation. Referring to a March 19 request sent to the senior generals by the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the National League for Democracy that the full CEC (including detainees ASSK and U Tin Oo) be allowed to meet to make a major party decision, the Minister said state leaders are considering the request and are waiting for the right timing. (Note: Several past such CEC requests received no reply. End note.)

Rohingyas: Not Our Problem

¶10. (C) Recalling the Minister's previous post as Western Commander overseeing Rakhine State, Mr. Blake solicited his views on the issue of the stateless Rohingya population based in Northern Rakhine State, noting the source of tension in the region. Echoing a sentiment shared by many Burmese, the Minister said the Rohingyas are not recognized among 135 ethnic groups and therefore not "ours." Nonetheless, he added, the Prime Minister had agreed that departed Rohingyas who are Burmese nationals will be allowed to return. The Minister observed that Rohingyas had been allowed to participate in the May 2008 constitutional referendum and

RANGOON 00000188 003.2 OF 003

said he expects they will be able to vote in upcoming elections. Mr. Blake asked the GOB to do what it can to help resolve the problem.

Passports for Local Embassy Employees

¶11. (C) The Charge asked for the Minister's help to resolve difficulties local embassy employees have with receiving and retaining Burmese passports, noting the need to send employees abroad for training and reminding that in the U.S. we regard freedom to travel as a right. The Minister pledged: "We will do our best" to resolve the issue but offered no further information.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) The meeting with Minister Maung Oo provided insight into the thinking of senior generals. They want to cooperate with the U.S. on certain issues. However, on core issues such as the stability and unity of the state, they are convinced theirs is the right approach and that they are simply misunderstood by opposition forces and the outside world. Changing that mindset will not be easy, but the conversation was constructive in tone and laid out views and concerns with clarity.
DINGER